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2008 YORK REGION TOURISM MARKETING PROGRAM ANNUAL REVIEW

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated January 30, 2009, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be circulated by the Tourism Branch to local municipalities, chambers of commerce, the board of trade and the York Region Tourism Advisory Group.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Regional Council with an overview of the activities implemented in the 2008 York Region Tourism Marketing Program.

3. BACKGROUND

Regional Council approved the 2008 York Region Tourism Marketing Program in October 2007 and the York Region Tourism Marketing Mid-Year Review report in June 2008. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the marketing, industry relations and destination development initiatives implemented in 2008.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The marketing initiatives implemented in 2008 were developed based on the Premier Ranked Tourism destination research, guidance from the York Region Tourism Advisory Group and through consultations with the tourism industry.

Industry Development initiatives and programs enhanced the marketing efforts and provided additional partnership and development opportunities for York Region tourism businesses.

Goals and Objectives

The activities support the goals of the tourism marketing program to:

- attract tourists and encourage repeat visitation
- generate overnight stays

- increase revenues and tourist spend
- strengthen urban and rural communities by supporting the development, growth and sustainability of the local tourism industry
- promote York Region as a viable four season destination.

Audience and Positioning Message

The tourism marketing program was focused on promoting York Region by experience and by season and was targeted to a domestic high yield demographic in two key market segments:

- Leisure Consumer: Overnight visitors, visiting friends and relatives and same day travellers based the geographic locations of York Region, GTA and rest of Ontario
- Meetings and Group: Business meetings, conferences, sport and recreation, travel trade and tour operators focusing on meeting planners based in York Region and the Greater Toronto Area, the York Region business community, Tour Operators based in Ontario and Quebec and sport tourism operators based in Ontario.

The positioning message in advertising campaigns and promotions speaks to York Region's key tourism experiences, Family Fun, Festival and Events, Arts and Culture, Distinctive Getaways, Agri-tourism Recreation and Golf.

Seasonal landing pages and contesting incorporated into the new *In Your Backyard* marketing and promotional campaigns provided valuable consumer data and performance metrics

For 2008, new creative with the theme, "*In Your Backyard*", was developed and utilized throughout the seasonal marketing and promotional campaigns. The 2008 program leveraged the success of previous campaigns and incorporated multi media tactics including print, television, radio and online.

All marketing and advertising activities directed consumers to seasonal landing pages on the tourism website (www.yorktourism.com), increasing the site's popularity and driving traffic to online tourism partners. All consumer inquiries and online click through rates, referrals, unique visitors and page views were tracked and measured to determine program success.

Seasonal consumer contests complemented the consumer leisure marketing programs and helped drive traffic to the website and capture consumer data and approval to allow for future communication from York Region.

The performance results of the 2008 marketing program include:

- 3,007 consumer contest entries
- 6,880 online and telephone inquiries responded to

- 102,000 unique visitors to the tourism website of which 46% of requested pages were directly to the business listings, getaway packages and the calendar of events
- \$116,483 from partners purchasing advertising and participating in tourism activities
- \$300,000 from the funding partnership agreement with Tourism Toronto through the hotel destination marketing fee contributions
- \$25,000 incremental funding from Tourism Toronto to support the enhanced summer promotions

Seasonal campaigns targeting consumers in Ontario, USA, Quebec and York Region implemented to increase visitation

The Spring/ summer advertising campaign targeted the Ontario market, upstate New York and Quebec through various tactics including print advertising in CAA, AAA, Wine Council of Ontario, Festival and Events Ontario, Great Toronto and Great Ontario Getaway magazines; on air and online radio campaigns with tourism partners on the Jewel and CHFI promotions in the Ontario Travel Information Centres; various online campaigns and e-blasts with Ontario Tourism and the Globe and Mail and commercials on all broadcasts of Rogers Television, “First Local”.

With concerns regarding a drop in visitation and hotel overnight stays, a \$75,000 enhanced summer getaway campaign targeting consumers in the Golden Horseshoe area was implemented and supported by \$25,000 in incremental funding from Tourism Toronto. Hotel packages under the theme of Girlfriend Getaways and Golf Getaways was promoted through double page advertorial and advertising for five consecutive weeks in the Toronto Star. Sympatico and MSN banner ads, text links and e-newsletters provided opportunities to target online consumers and direct consumers to the hotel packages that were created to support the campaign.

The Fall campaign targeted residents from the GTA, York Region, Quebec and New York State promoting the *In Your Backyard, FestiFALL magazine*. The campaign tactics included a resident unaddressed ad mail drop to 300,000 homes in York Region, online promotions with CHFI Loyalty Club and Ontario Tourism, radio promotions with the Jewel Radio; Globe & Mail e-flyers and various print media including City Magazines distributed throughout York Region and Ontario and the Ontario Tourism Great Drives program.

The Winter campaign targeted residents of York Region and the Greater Toronto Area through Jewel Radio, Rogers Television and web based campaigns with Ontario Tourism. In addition, 3500 York Region bookmarks highlighting winter festivals and activities were distributed at 10 community events through partnership programs with local municipalities and 25,000 bookmarks were distributed at various events throughout Ontario through a *Snow Globe* promotion with Ontario Tourism.

Various on line, print and direct mail campaigns implemented to build awareness and increase market share from the meeting and group markets

Initiatives intended that continued to build awareness in the Corporate Meeting and Conference market included renewing our partnership with the Canadian Society of Association Executives, Meeting Planners International and the Canadian Society of Professional Event Planners. In partnership with Tourism Toronto, York Region attended the Meeting & Incentive Travel and the Incentive Works tradeshow. To build awareness of York Region as a meeting destination, a new publication was developed and distributed at the tradeshow and was distributed to 10,000 corporations through a partnership with Ignite Magazine.

Assistance is regularly provided to meeting planners and association planners to facilitate site selection and connecting planners to local tourism business. These activities resulted in six meeting and conference leads being generated and circulated to the tourism partners to secure the business.

To encourage Leisure Group Business, York Region implemented online, print and direct mail campaigns targeting the U.S. and Ontario based tour operators with a focus on the student and youth markets. York Region had 36 appointments with tour operators at the Ontario Motor Coach Association conference and enhanced awareness of York Region's tourism products through exposure as one of the sponsors at the conference opening reception.

Activities intended to build awareness to York Region's sporting venues included two presentations to the coaches and teams of the Markham Sports Council, an eight page feature in the Dudley Hewitt Hockey Tournament Program and a partnership with the International Silver Sticks Hockey Tournament. Results to date included a booth and distribution of the 2008 York Region Discovery Guide at the Milliken Mill Unionville Soccer tournament and planning assistance to secure the Markham Fencing Club as host of the 2008 provincial championships.

Enhancements to the tourism website and five promotional publications were distributed to build top of mind awareness for York Region's tourism experiences

York Region Tourism Website – yorktourism.com

New features to the tourism website include the Tourism Industry News blog which enhances communication to tourism industry partners and the addition of new survey software enables contesting options and the collection and tracking of consumer data.

York Region Discovery Guide

A total of 156 tourism businesses advertised in the Guide generating \$87,325 in advertising revenue. The guide increased to 84 pages and included a new pull out York Region map and 10 attraction discount coupons.

In Your Backyard, FestFALL Magazine

A total of 15 York Region tourism businesses advertised in the magazine, up 50% from the previous year, generating \$7000 in advertising revenue. An unaddressed postcard drop to residents of York Region resulted in over 5,000 inquiries for the magazine.

York Region Driving Successful Meeting In Your Backyard Brochure

This new brochure was developed featuring innovation meeting and accommodation options to build top of mind awareness for York Region as a meeting destination.

Touring York Region and Student Experiences Profile

Two profiles featuring tourism experiences targeting the adult and the student group markets were distributed at conferences and through direct mail campaigns to 2,500 tour operators.

York Region Golf Feature

In partnership with seven Golf partners, a 10 page York Region Golf feature was included in the GTA Golfers Guide and distributed to 50,000 golf related locations throughout Ontario.

Several educational and networking opportunities provided to the tourism industry to further develop York Region as a tourism destination

The development of new opportunities to benefit the tourism industry is key to growing York Region as a tourism destination. The following were provided to tourism partners:

- Celebrate Ontario grant application assistance was provided to regional based festival and events including, Windfall Ecology Festival, Whitchurch-Stouffville Strawberry Festival, Kingfest, Kleinburg BIA – Bindertwine, Aurora Street Festival, Resurgence Theatre, Markham Jazz Festival, Unionville Street Festival. Markham Jazz Festival was successful in securing \$37,000 in funding.
- A Hotel Partner Marketing meeting was conducted with 20 hotel General Managers and Director of Sales.
- An education seminar on website marketing tactics was provided to 22 York Region industry partners.
- A familiarization tour of key attractions in Markham, Stouffville and Richmond Hill was provided to 12 front line hotel staff with the goal of increasing knowledge of the Region and improve customer service to hotel guests.
- The Tourism Industry News Blog was established to communicate and update York Region tourism industry on marketing activities, promotional opportunities, industry news and partner profiles.
- York Region Day at Union Station – in June and September, 12 industry partners distributed a total of 20,000 promotional bags to commuters travelling through Union Station. A contest available only on yorktourism.com collected valuable contact data from commuters who picked up the promotional bag.

- The Annual Tourism Conference was held in November with 80 industry partners in attendance and keynote presentations were delivered from the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation and the Ministry of Tourism.

Building partnerships and maintaining a strong marketing presence with a renewed focus on priorities designed to optimize return on investment is required in today's economic conditions

Continuing to build collaboration and partnerships to instill a regional approach to destination marketing is key to York Region's ability to deliver a successful tourism program in 2009. With the internet playing an increasing significant role in consumer travel planning, it is important to continue to enhance the current on-line activities to maximize York Region's presence. Integrated web media tactics, video streaming and additional web features will be incorporated into the tourism website to engage the on-line consumer. Taking into account these key learnings combined with the concerning economic conditions, supports maintaining a strong marketing presence in 2009 with a renewed focus on priorities designed to optimize return-on-investment.

Relationship to Vision 2026

The activities outlined in this report support the Vibrant Economy and Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture Goals of Vision 2026 and are a core component of the York Region Economic Development Strategy.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The tourism program initiatives were funded in the 2008 Operation Budget allocation and were augmented by \$300,000 from Tourism Toronto destination marketing fee and advertising support from the tourism industry partners.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Region's tourism program is based on developing and promoting a range of tourism experiences that will impact all municipalities throughout York Region. The tourism program provided opportunities for local municipalities and tourism businesses to maximize their tourism potential enhance job and wealth creation while contributing to the quality of life for residents.

7. CONCLUSION

The 2008 tourism program activities continued to raise the level of interaction with the tourism industry and partner businesses while collaborative opportunities avoided duplication of efforts, focused resources and expanded market reach. The marketing priorities build upon York Region's key experiences and strongest audience markets to maximize visitation and economic impact.

For more information on this report, please contact Brenda McGowan, Manager, Tourism Development at (905) 830 4444, Ext. 1553 or Patrick Draper, Director Economic Strategy and Tourism at Ext 1503.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.